

**'I had gone to Lahore with a message of goodwill but in return we got
Kargil': the promise and perils of 'leaps of trust' in India-Pakistan
nuclear relations.**

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Just over a decade since India and Pakistan announced their effective entry into the nuclear club by testing the Bomb, the two countries remain locked in a bitter enmity that has characterised their relationship since partition. This enmity has led to three major conventional wars, decades of skirmishing and low-intensity conflict, and the fear since the late 1980s that the next armed conflict between these two powers would lead to the development and use of nuclear weapons. Set against this, so-called 'proliferation optimists' have argued that the fear of a nuclear exchange has so concentrated minds that it has played a critical role in reducing the risks of war during the periodic crises that have occurred (Ganguly and Hagerty 2005). Nevertheless, the risk remains that eventually a crisis could spiral out of control, leading the South Asian powers to stumble into the world's first regional nuclear war.

Against this background of deep-rooted fear and suspicion, it is important to remember that shortly after both powers became nuclear-armed, there was an attempt by one side to overcome the psychology of mutual distrust by undertaking a dramatic conciliatory move. In February 1999, the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee made what can be called a 'leap of trust' when he met with his Pakistani counterpart at Lahore. The historic symbolism of this visit and the positive interpersonal dynamics between the two leaders made possible the signing of the 'Lahore Declaration' and a 'Memorandum of Understanding'. These agreements were trumpeted by their architects as ushering in a new era of cooperation in relations between India and Pakistan, especially in the nuclear area. Unfortunately, the hopes for trust briefly glimpsed at Lahore quickly evaporated. Vajpayee's leap was seen as failing when a few

months later Pakistani forces infiltrated themselves across the Line of Control (LoC). The ensuing Kargil crisis, named after the place where the infiltration took place, threatened to escalate into a full-scale war between India and Pakistan.

Although there have been no subsequent leaps of trust by either side, it is evident that some degree of trust has been recoverable in the relationship. India and Pakistan renewed discussions over the nuclear issue and Kashmir through the Composite Dialogue that began in 2004. There have been the occasional high-water marks during this process where trust has grown, but progress has been incremental and where it has occurred it has taken the form of mutually agreed steps. Even here, the problem has been how to insulate the process of cooperation from the conflictual elements in the relationship – most problematically in relation to Kashmir – which all too easily have come to dominate relations. In a story familiar to theorists of the security dilemma, each side has viewed the other's behaviour as evidence of hostile intent whilst failing to see how its own actions might be seen as threatening. This has created a vicious circle of security competition where each side has looked to its adversary to make the moves that would signal a new cooperative approach.

This is why Vajpayee's attempt to build trust was such an important one. It was one of those rare occasions in international politics when a leader made a highly significant conciliatory move to signal trustworthiness rather than the normal situation where adversaries expect the other side to make the first move. Vajpayee's leap of trust backfired. But the key question is whether this was a case of Vajpayee misplacing trust in the Pakistani leader, Nawaz Sharif, who betrayed him with the Kargil operation. Or, alternatively, was Sharif personally

committed to building trust with Vajpayee but he was frustrated in this by domestic forces at home, crucially the military.

Despite the failure of Vajpayee's leap of trust, it is important to explore what lessons might be learned from this case for any future leaps of trust that Indian and Pakistani decision-makers might make to avoid an escalating nuclear arms competition. The paper is divided into four parts. First, I briefly explore the concept of a leap of trust and distinguish it from other approaches to trust-building. I use security dilemma theorising to show how leaps only become possible in a context where decision-makers in adversary relationships understand their hostility as driven by mutual fear and suspicion. Next, the paper explores how it became possible for Vajpayee to make his extraordinary trust-building move, and the role that Sharif played in facilitating the Indian leader's leap. I assume in this part of the paper that the Pakistani leader was genuinely committed to working with Vajpayee in developing a new cooperative relationship. The third part of the paper revisits this key assumption. It does so by examining how far Sharif deceived Vajpayee by planning with his generals the attack at Kargil. The final part of the paper considers whether the trust that had made possible the breakthrough at Lahore completely disappeared after Kargil.

The leap of trust

The concept of trust has been marginalised in the theory and practice of International Relations, and I would argue that this has had negative consequences for exploring viable alternatives to a nuclear-armed world. As John Dunn so aptly expressed, 'The question of whom to trust and how far is as central a question of political life as it is of personal life' (Dunn 1993). I define

successful trust-building in the nuclear context as ‘a relationship in which two or more actors, based on mutual interpretations of attitudes and behaviour believe that they can be relied upon now - and in the future - to desist from exploiting their military capabilities – actual or potential – in ways that will be damaging to them’ (see also Booth and Wheeler 2008: 230).

Security dilemma dynamics

The starting point for thinking about the possibilities of building trust between India and Pakistan is recognition of the importance of the concept of the security dilemma. For the purposes of this paper, I am defining the security dilemma as the inescapable uncertainty that confronts states about the motives and intentions of those that can do them harm (Booth and Wheeler 2008 – compare Jervis 1976, 1978). The security dilemma gives rise to what has been called the ‘dilemma of interpretation’ and the ‘dilemma of response’ (Booth and Wheeler 2008: 3-6). With regard to the former, those responsible for national security policy have to decide whether another state’s actions – especially its military behaviour - signal that it is acting defensively only (to enhance its security in an uncertain world) or whether it has offensive purposes (seeking to change the status quo to its advantage). Decision-makers then need to determine how to respond. If the dilemma of response is based on misplaced suspicion regarding the motives and intentions of other actors, and decision-makers react in a militarily confrontational manner, then they risk creating a significant level of mutual hostility when none was originally intended by either party; if the response is based on misplaced trust, there is a risk they will be exposed to coercion by those with hostile intentions.

If decision makers resolve the dilemma of interpretation in favour of the view that they face a state with aggressive motives and intentions, then the logical policy prescription is to maximise their deterrent capabilities and avoid showing any sign of weakness or lack of resolve. Jervis called this approach to national security the 'deterrence model' (Jervis 1976: 58-113) and I would argue that it has been the dominant frame through which Indian and Pakistani decision-makers have viewed each other's behaviour since partition.

There is an alternative frame available to Indian and Pakistani decision-makers in explaining their hostile interactions which is to conceive them as an example of what Robert Jervis called the spiral model. He explained this as a situation where two states (mis)perceive each other as having aggressive intent when each is only acting defensively; the result a spiral of mutual hostility that might have been avoided through a better understanding of these dynamics. One key factor that inhibits actors from understanding that they might be in a spiral situation is their powerfully ingrained peaceful/defensive self-images. As Jervis wrote, what drives the spiral is the inability of policy-makers to 'recognize that one's own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other's hostility can only be explained by its aggressiveness' (Jervis 1976: 75; 1988: 337).

The British historian Herbert Butterfield was the first to show how governments with peaceful/defensive intent conspired (through their failure to see themselves as others saw them) to provoke other governments to behave in ways that raised the level of mutual insecurity. Butterfield argued that the only escape from these pernicious psychological dynamics was for governments to

understand that others were behaving in what appears to be strategically hostile ways because they are fearful, not because they have aggressive or predatory intentions. But it was exactly this sort of understanding that Butterfield saw as closed off to policy-makers and diplomats. Butterfield wrote, 'It is the peculiar characteristic of the situation I am describing – *the situation of what I should call Hobbesian fear* – that you yourself may vividly feel the terrible fear that you have of the other party, but you cannot enter into the other man's counter-fear, or even understand why he should be particularly nervous' (Butterfield 1951: 21)

Butterfield and Jervis's exploration of the psychological dynamics that fuel distrust might explain the problem that New Delhi and Islamabad have had in empathising with each other's security fears. Because each has believed that the other knows it is not a threat, neither has been able to recognise how its own policies which it sees as defensive might appear highly threatening from the other's point of view. Here, it is important to realise how far this mutual suspicion and distrust has been fed by bitter historical memories – including the painful legacy of three major wars.

But on what epistemological and methodological grounds should policy-makers and analysts privilege a spiral explanation of India-Pakistan interactions over a deterrent one? The problem is that there is no Olympian viewpoint from which observers can make such a definitive claim. Despite Butterfield's claim that it was only historians who, in retrospect, would be able to make reliable assessments as to whether a situation was explainable in spiral terms, the fact is that history offers no final resting point for resolving these issues. Historians, for example, continue to disagree about the motives and intentions that led to war in

1914 and 1939. This is because the security dilemma – defined as the existential condition of uncertainty regarding the motives and intentions of others - can never be escaped in world politics (Booth and Wheeler 2008).

If spiral situations exist because policy-makers fail to understand security dilemma dynamics (Jervis 1978: 181), then it follows that the strongest evidence for the existence of a spiral is for policy-makers on one - or preferably both sides - to come to frame their mutual hostility in these terms. Such empathetic responsiveness on the part of leaders to the security concerns of others has been called 'security dilemma sensibility.' This has been defined as an 'actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear' (Booth and Wheeler 2008: 7). The intention and capacity to exercise security dilemma sensibility is a rarity because it requires leaders and diplomats to overcome their strongly held peaceful/defensive self-images, as well as to avoid ideological stereotyping of adversaries.

Yet even if leaders understand the importance of exercising security dilemma sensibility, there are important barriers to translating such individual-level empathy into state-level policies that can build trust. The fundamental problem facing policy-makers who want to empathise with their adversaries is the worry that their assessment of the other side's motives and intentions as peaceful/defensive might be wrong. Consequently, even governments that

consider themselves to be in a spiral situation will be reluctant to make the sort of concessions that might leave them exposed if it turns out that they are facing an aggressor. Thus, Jervis warned that governments with peaceful/defensive intentions should 'design policies that will provide safety' if their trust in others proves mistaken, and that as a result 'even if both sides believe that the other desires only protection, they may find that there is no policy and level of arms that is mutually satisfactory' (Jervis 1976). The difficulty in following Jervis's advice for a state that wants to signal its trustworthiness is that building trust often requires states to lower their guard and take some risks. The trouble being that the kind of policies that might reassure an adversary are exactly those that can leave that state in danger of being exploited or coerced if it turns out that the other side is untrustworthy (Montgomery 2007).

Offensive realists are even more pessimistic than Jervis on the possibilities for building trust. In the world of offensive realism, the fact that intentions are 'impossible to divine with 100 per cent certainty' compels states to behave as if they were aggressors, and accumulating power is the only way to survive (Mearsheimer 2001). Thus, even if decision-makers are confident that another state's intentions are currently peaceful, Mearsheimer argued that they still have to choose the offensive option because 'a state's intentions can be benign one day and hostile the next' (Mearsheimer 2001 – see also Copeland 2000, 2003).

In any discussion of the risks and potential costs that face decision-makers who misplace their trust in others, it is crucial to remember that following the maxim of worst-case thinking also brings with it risks and potential costs. And unless decision-makers are prepared through trust-building initiatives to test

whether mutual hostility is the result of security dilemma dynamics, they risk becoming trapped in a situation where misplaced suspicion leads to unnecessary and dangerous security competition.

Building trust step-by-step or in one big leap

The risks of a trust-building initiative exposing the trustor (the leader or government seeking to build trust) to high costs can be minimised if governments pursue a *graduated* approach to trust-building. This could be a bilateral process where two adversaries develop enough trust in each other to reach agreement on a limited number of Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMS) that both will take. However, the problem is how to establish this level of trust in the first place, and this is where unilateral moves aimed at building trust become important.

An example of this unilateral approach to generating trust is Charles Osgood's strategy of GRIT (Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction). The basic idea was that if one state could make a series of limited conciliatory moves, this might trigger reciprocation by the other, leading to a virtuous cycle of tension reduction and confidence building. If reciprocity was forthcoming, Osgood argued that the initiating state should follow up with bolder initiatives. If there was no positive response, he argued that the state pursuing GRIT should carry on making limited unilateral gestures of goodwill in the hope of triggering reciprocation (Osgood 1969).

The gradualist but unilateral approach to trust-building expects decision-makers to take risks only when they are confident that cooperative moves will not

be exploited and/or where there is a clear margin of safety. For this gradualist approach to work, decision-makers in the state with whom an actor is trying to build trust must interpret the action as a genuine conciliatory move. What often blocks decision-makers in adversarial relationships from framing a genuine cooperative move in this way is that they operate with what Ole Holsti once called ‘an inherent bad faith model’ (Finlay et al. 1967: 26). This mindset leads decision-makers to operate with a frame which views any apparent conciliatory move by the other side as either a trick to lull them into a false sense of security or as a sign of weakness that is seen as vindicating a policy of negotiating from a position of strength.

There is an alternative to the step-by-step approach which has greater potential to transform the threat perceptions of an adversary. This is the idea of a leader or government making a unilateral ‘leap of trust.’ Rather than the dramatic moves that would signal a state’s trustworthiness coming *after* trust has been built up as in the gradualist approach, the aim of a leap is to signal one’s potential trustworthiness to an adversary in a frame-breaking conciliatory move.¹

As I discussed above, orthodox thinking about statecraft traditionally honours playing it safe, yet international history furnishes us with a set of significant cases in which leaders chose (with positive outcomes) to take a leap of trust. A good example of such radical risk-taking was the courageous decision by President Anwar Sadat of Egypt in 1977 to fly to Jerusalem, and in a speech before the Knesset publicly to recognize the right of Israel to exist.

¹ I am grateful to Roderick Kramer for suggesting this formulation.

Although Sadat's leap eventually led to a spectacular breakthrough in Egypt-Israel relations through the Camp David process, leaps depend for their success on the leadership in the adversary state inviting and/or welcoming the initiative. Leaps, then, are a much more risky undertaking than the graduated approach because they require leaders who are prepared to take risks in order to begin building trust – risks of being rebuffed, exposed, and exploited. Nevertheless, as an optimistic reading of Sharif's motives and intentions in the Lahore process illustrates, leaders who positively reciprocate a leaper also expose themselves to political risks from domestic opponents of such trust-building moves. What counts as positive reciprocation will vary from case-to-case, as will the value to be accorded a particular leap as a trust-building move. Some leaps – as with Vajpayee's decision to go to Lahore – will be primarily symbolic, whereas others might entail a level of concessions that sends a very strong signal of an actor's trustworthiness. A leap often depends for its success on the actor to whom the leap is directed responding with an even bigger leap. Leapfrogging of this kind could be a key engine of trust-building in relationships where fear and distrust have previously dominated.

'A Defining Moment in South Asian History'?

These were the words spoken by Vajpayee as he toasted his arrival at Lahore on the morning of Saturday 20 February 1999. In a highly symbolic step, he had joined the bus at Amritsar which was making its maiden journey on the newly inaugurated bus link between New Delhi and Lahore. This bus route had been suspended for the last fifty-one years, and its re-opening grew out of an

agreement between the two countries a few months earlier. How, then, did Vajpayee become only the third Indian Prime Minister to visit Pakistan, and the first to do so by crossing a surface border? (Wirsing 2003:19)

The urgency of establishing a more cooperative relationship was underlined by the dangerous deterioration of relations that took place during May 1998 as India and Pakistan engaged in tit-for-tat nuclear tests. New Delhi's nuclear tests of 11 and 13 May triggered great anxiety in Islamabad as to whether India might use its new nuclear position to launch a conventional attack against Pakistan's nuclear facilities or seek to intimidate Pakistan into making concessions over Kashmir (Ganguly and Hagerty 2005: 127-32). Such fears were fuelled by the belligerent rhetoric coming out of New Delhi, and it came as little surprise when Islamabad followed suit on 28 May by testing its own nuclear devices. Both sides came out of what Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty have called 'The 1998 Nuclear Tests Crisis' with a greater appreciation of the need to find ways of stabilising their nuclear competition and reassuring each other about their nuclear motives and intentions.

The first sign of this new diplomatic engagement was a letter that Vajpayee wrote to Sharif on 14 June in which he reiterated India's commitment to peaceful relations and developing what he called a 'stable structure of cooperation' (Cherian 1998). Sharif accepted Vajpayee's invitation that they meet for a bilateral discussion the following month at the 10th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which was meeting in Colombo. The meeting was cordial and when asked by a reporter, Sharif described Vajpayee as a 'good man.' However, there was little sign of the personal chemistry between

the two leaders that was to develop in subsequent months, and few would have predicted on the basis of the Colombo meeting the dramatic turn of events that was to follow.

The atmosphere between the two leaders was much warmer during their next meeting in September at the UN General Assembly, and this time there were some concrete results (Chawla 1998). It was at this meeting that India and Pakistan agreed to reopen the bus link between New Delhi and Lahore, and to resume the talks at foreign minister level that had been suspended during the last twelve months. Despite the bonhomie between the leaders, these new talks that took place in Islamabad in October and New Delhi the following month proved no more successful than the previous ones had been in achieving a breakthrough, crucially on the question of Kashmir, and each side in a familiar and well-worn script blamed the other for any lack of progress (The Statesman 1999). India's Union Home Minister did not help the atmosphere in the November talks when he described Pakistan as a 'terrorist state', an attitude that summed up the distrust which senior Indian policy-makers felt towards the motives and intentions of their nuclear-armed neighbour (The Statesman 1999).

What Indian and Pakistani officials could not overcome in their discussions in late 1998 was their deeply ingrained peaceful/defensive self-images, and this obstacle to building trust was compounded by the bad faith model that each applied to the motives and intentions of the other. Consequently, neither set of officials was able to exercise security dilemma sensibility by entering into the counter-fear of their opposite numbers and understanding how their own actions might appear as threatening.

By contrast with the 'deterrence model' thinking that dominated the Indian Foreign Ministry at this time, it would appear that Vajpayee himself was more open to the possibility that India and Pakistan might be able to overcome the fear and suspicion that had poisoned relations between them. Although there is no direct evidence that he framed the conflictual dynamics between India and Pakistan in terms of a spiral situation, he would not have sought a dialogue with Pakistan if he had believed that such an approach would whet the Pakistani appetite for aggression against India. Moreover, to build trust with the Pakistan Government he was prepared to make a significant conciliatory move that would signal India's peaceful/defensive intentions. What seems to have been important in leading the Indian Prime Minister to believe that there was space for India to put into practice policies of security dilemma sensibility was his conviction that the Pakistani prime minister could be trusted to respond positively to a trust-building initiative. After their positive meeting at the UN in September, the two leaders had begun a series of conversations by phone that encouraged Vajpayee to think that a bold Indian move might lead to significant progress. It is reported that the Prime Minister's Office was exploring 'all options' in the run-up to the Lahore meeting that might enable Vajpayee to decisively signal India's peaceful/defensive intentions (Malhotra 1999a).

Vajpayee's confidence that Sharif would prove a reliable partner in building trust between their two countries grew when the Pakistani leader gave him just the opening he had been looking for in an interview he gave to the editor of *The Indian Express* Shekhar Gupta on 2 February. Sharif made a plea for him and Vajpayee to meet immediately and begin direct negotiations on the nuclear issue.

The Pakistani leader was not noted for his critical reflexivity. However, his explanation of the distrust between India and Pakistan could be interpreted as evidence that he framed the hostility between the two countries in terms of a spiral situation rather than one where Pakistan was reacting to Indian aggressiveness. He said in the interview that 'It is time the political leadership moved in and set a road map on all this...We can finalise treaties and agreements that will reduce threats and fears...The (nuclear) threat...is all here. So why not resolve the issue between ourselves?' (Gupta 1999). A crucial moment in the interview came when Sharif responded positively to Gupta asking him whether he would welcome Vajpayee travelling on the inaugural bus journey to Lahore.

This was the kind of big idea that would have appealed to Vajpayee's self-image as a great statesman and man of destiny. India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh revealed a few days after Sharif's invitation that his Prime Minister had been pondering this idea for several weeks (Mohan 1999). It would appear, then, that Gupta's question to Sharif was aimed at testing the Pakistani leader's receptivity to this idea. Within 24 hours, Vajpayee had accepted Sharif's invitation to ride on the bus to Lahore, one of Pakistan's most historic and symbolic cities. Going to Lahore was a daring move that held out the promise of overcoming decades of distrust. The initial Pakistani response suggested that they also saw Vajpayee's move as a potential frame-breaking one. The Pakistani Information Minister Mushahid Hussein said, 'We feel that Vajpayee has taken a very bold initiative...he has acted in a very non-traditional manner...he has bypassed the Indian establishment's rigid and obsolete approach to Pakistan' (Gannon 1999).

Leaps of trust always involve political risks, not only for those taking the leap who incur the greatest risks, but also for those who invite/welcome such a move. With regard to the latter, Sharif faced strong opposition from the Islamist party Jamaat-I-Islami and elements within the Pakistani Foreign Ministry (Cherian 1999; Shourie 1999; Baruah 1999). Assuming Sharif's bona fides in bringing Vajpayee to Lahore – an assumption to be critically analysed below - the Pakistani Prime Minister also faced considerable opposition from the military (for a different view see Cherian 1999). At the same time, Sharif knew that many ordinary Pakistanis welcomed his efforts at breaking the deadlock in India-Pakistan relations.

Vajpayee also had to deal with critics who opposed his trust-building moves. Sharif's plea in his interview for a new start in Indo-Pakistani relations helped defuse criticism from within the ranks of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Moreover, as the leader of a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, Vajpayee had good credentials to act as a peacemaker, and his initiative was applauded by wider Indian public opinion. However, there were still critics both inside and outside the government who viewed his Lahore adventure as a dangerous fantasy that would encourage Pakistani aggression against India.

This distrust of Pakistani intentions appeared to be unwarranted when set against the trust that flourished between Vajpayee and Sharif during their time together at Lahore. Indian and Pakistani officials had been trying for the past few months to reach agreement on nuclear Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs). However, they had failed to make significant progress, crucially because Pakistan insisted on linking any agreement to progress on

Kashmir. The personal chemistry between the two leaders was such that in a meeting which lasted a day and a half, amidst the pomp and splendour of the evening banquet held on the Saturday night in honour of Vajpayee at the Lahore Fort and a civic reception the following afternoon, they were able to cut through the months of diplomatic stalemate and reach agreement on two documents. First the 'Lahore Declaration' which set out the general principles to regulate India-Pakistan relations in the new nuclear security environment of South Asia; and second, a 'Memorandum of Understanding' signed by the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Secretaries in which both sides pledged to keep each other informed of any ballistic missile tests, agreed to continue their moratorium on nuclear testing (except in a situation of supreme national emergency), and work towards an upgrading of communication links as well as other measures that would reduce the risks of an accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons (Wirsing 2003: 19, 24; Sidhu 2004: 89; Ganguly and Hagerty 2005: 151; Khan 2005: 173). The Memorandum has been criticised for the lack of agreement on substantive matters (Cherian 1999) and three analysts described it in 2004 as being 'little more than limited transparency measures' (Mian, Nayyar, and Ramana 2004). However, what this assessment overlooked was that both sides committed themselves to setting up working groups to work out the details with a view to reaching a formal treaty by the middle of 1999.

Sharif was under great pressure from the military not to cave in on the Kashmir issue and he insisted that it had to be included in the text of the Lahore Declaration. However, the Pakistani Prime Minister also recognised that he could not hold progress on nuclear CBMs hostage to a breakthrough over Kashmir. He knew that after the nuclear tests of May 1998, there was a new urgency to

developing security cooperation, and that a normalisation of relations with India would be popular at home and abroad. Nevertheless, he took a significant political risk with the hardliners in his government, and crucially the military, when he settled for wording in the Lahore Declaration which talked about no more than intensifying efforts at finding a solution to the problem of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sharif's apparent willingness to compromise on Kashmir was undoubtedly made easier by the heady atmosphere of peace which Vajpayee evoked by his stunningly symbolic act of becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the tower at Minar-e-Pakistan. This monument commemorates the place where in 1940 the Muslim League had issued their appeal for a separate state for the Muslims of British colonial India. No previous Indian Prime Minister had gone to Pakistan's birthplace which Islamabad has interpreted as evidence that India does not accept Pakistan's right to exist, and that New Delhi would swallow up Pakistan if the chance presented itself. Vajpayee understood the importance of visiting the Minar-e-Pakistan since it was his way of reassuring Pakistanis that India had peaceful/defensive intentions (Wirsing 2003: 19; Ganguly and Hagerty 2005: 151). In the visitor's book, he wrote what he had said the previous night which was that 'India is for a united, stable, prosperous Pakistan.' He revealed later that day in his speech at the civic reception that there had been a debate among his advisors as to whether he should put 'his seal on Pakistan.' He said to rapturous applause that he had responded 'does Pakistan run on my seal?...Pakistan has its own seal, that seal is recognised in the whole world' (Shourie 1999). He talked much during those hours in Lahore about the importance of building trust, and by visiting the Miner-e-Pakistan he sought to

demonstrate to Sharif and the Pakistani people that he was sincere in bringing the olive branch to Lahore.

Given the hopes and expectations for a new era of India-Pakistan relations that Vajpayee and Sharif conjured up by the magic of their meeting at Lahore, it is a cruel and bitter irony that only a few months later the two leaders should be sitting on top of military machines engaged in conventional fighting across the LoC, and with the ever present danger that this conflict could escalate into a nuclear confrontation. Did Sharif and his generals betray the promise of Lahore by seeking to achieve military gains in Kashmir whilst Vajpayee's Government took its eye off the ball, basking as it was in the triumph of Lahore? Or, was Sharif a sincere interlocutor with Vajpayee for peace whose efforts were shipwrecked by a military operation that was planned in secret by Pakistani generals and conducted without Sharif's knowledge, let alone approval?

Sending Vajpayee's bus of trust over a Himalayan sized-cliff²

The Kargil crisis was triggered in early May 1999 when India discovered that Pakistan had infiltrated irregular and regular forces across the LoC in the Kargil area.³ The Pakistani military had seen an opportunity to seize control of the high

² The title of this section is an adaptation of a line in Christopher Kremmer's article where he says 'The stab in the back at Kargil has sent Vajpayee's bus diplomacy over a Himalayan-sized cliff' (see Kremmer 1999).

³ Pakistan has always denied that its forces crossed the LoC. It has claimed that the conflict was caused by 'Kashmiri freedom fighting Mujahideen' (Musharraf 2006: 87-88 is typical of this) operating across the LoC which led India to overreact by attacking across the LoC leading to hostilities with Pakistani forces. Musharraf also claims controversially

ground and gain a strategic advantage against the Indian military, a jockeying for position on the heights which had been a feature of their military interactions for the previous fifty years (Wirsing 2003: 40-2; Musharraf 2006: 87-8; Kapur 2007). However, Pakistan's intrusion across the LoC was on a scale not seen since the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 (Sidhu 2000). Though there is some suggestion that this operation had been planned as far back as 1987, Pakistani military analysts claim that the operation only became feasible in 1996 when a road was completed on the Pakistani side of the LoC that would allow the forward logistic support necessary to support a military operation of this kind (Sidhu 2000). The Indian response in the form of air strikes against Pakistan's new positions on the heights and a subsequent ground offensive led to relatively high casualty rates on both sides. Moreover, this was a crisis in which both sides threatened the other with nuclear escalation, and it was the spectre of the conflict turning nuclear that galvanised the Clinton Administration into a shuttle diplomacy that ended the crisis.

'How did the journey we began at Lahore end in Kargil?' This was the question that Vajpayee is claimed to have put to a Pakistani mediator, Mr. Niaz Naik, who had visited his residence on 27 June in an effort to end hostilities and restart the peace process.⁴ Vajpayee's own answer to his question was that 'It that Pakistani military deployments on the heights prior to the commencement of hostilities were defensive in response to warning indicators that India was preparing offensive operations (2006: 90-5).

4 Unfortunately, we only have Naik's account to verify this. The story of Naik's mediation efforts and his claim that he was the principal Pakistan intermediary in backchannel negotiations that were close to reaching an agreement over Kashmir before the process

was a betrayal of the trust that I sought to build in Lahore' (Vajpayee 2002). Given that Kargil scuppered the peace process that had been begun at Lahore, why did Pakistan's decision-makers choose to betray Vajpayee's trust in such a barefaced and dangerous manner?

The best explanation for the Pakistani leadership's decision to abandon the process begun at Lahore is that the military architects of Kargil did not want a negotiated settlement over Kashmir that precluded Pakistan's takeover of the disputed territory. Since this grouping saw the latter as anathema to New Delhi, Pakistan had no alternative but to exploit every opportunity to make strategic gains at its adversary's expense. The leader of this group within the government was the Chief of Army Staff General Pervez Musharraf. Even before the two prime ministers had met at Lahore, it is claimed that the Pakistani military was engaged in preparations for Kargil (Kapur 2007). This commitment to a military solution in Kashmir reflected Musharraf's belief that whatever the rhetoric of Indian leaders to the contrary, New Delhi would never make the kind of concessions that would satisfy Pakistan (or at least Musharraf) over Kashmir (Perkovich 2002; Shinkman 2002).

Although Musharraf and the other top brass opposed the Lahore peace process, Pakistan's initial successes in taking control of positions along the heights undoubtedly benefited from the so-called 'spirit of Lahore.' The problem was that the Indian leadership appears to have been lulled into a false sense of security after the Lahore meeting by their confidence in Pakistan's peaceful

was torpedoed by Kargil is told in Wirsing 2003: 25-36.

intentions towards Kashmir. India even went so far as to cut-back surveillance flights near the LoC and downplayed reports of increased Pakistani military activity in that area (Ganguly and Hagerty 2005: 152, 159). Pakistani military leaders might, as Perkovich argued, 'bristled at the lofty, conciliatory rhetoric and the intimations of pending rapprochement' (2002) at Lahore, but they must have been emboldened in their adventurism over Kargil by their adversary letting down its guard after Lahore. Is it going too far to suggest that the Pakistani political and military leadership were working hand in glove here? Did Sharif lure Vajpayee to Lahore by talking the language of peace whilst his generals prepared for war in the Himalayan Mountains?

That Pakistan had betrayed India, Vajpayee had no doubt, but he never publicly accused the Pakistani leader of betraying him. This suggests that he continued to believe in Sharif's personal bona fides, and blamed the Pakistani military for destroying the hopes for peace that had tantalisingly opened up at Lahore. Was Vajpayee right to continue to place his trust in Sharif after Kargil? The available record permits no definitive answer here, and we are left to choose between three contending interpretations of the Pakistani prime minister's role in the Kargil episode. The first is that Sharif and the Defence Committee of the Cabinet both knew about and fully supported the planning for Kargil even before Sharif had embraced Vajpayee at Lahore. Not surprisingly, Musharraf has vigorously asserted this view claiming in the aftermath of Kargil that 'everybody was on board' (Malhotra 1999b - see also Perkovich 2002: 473; Wirsing 2003: 46). More specifically, Musharraf claimed in his 2006 memoir that Sharif was

briefed on the operation on 29 January, 5 February,⁵ and 12 March, as well as during the operation itself (2006: 96 – see also Kapur 118-19)⁶

The second interpretation of Sharif's role is diametrically opposed to the first and maintains that he and his fellow ministers were hoodwinked into a military operation aimed at sabotaging the fledgling peace process (Wirsing 2003: 38). Did the military fear that Sharif was in danger of giving away the store on Kashmir and act to frustrate this eventuality? Support for this view comes from Niaz Naik who was reported in the Urdu newspaper *Jang* in late 2001 as saying that India and Pakistan had been close to reaching an agreement over Kashmir when the Kargil crisis intervened. Naik said that Vajpayee and Sharif had been holding regular telephone conversations and that the 'back-channel diplomacy' over Kashmir had been conducted with 'little' knowledge on the part of the Army.' In an account that directly challenged the statements of Musharraf and other key Pakistani leaders, Naik asserted that Sharif knew nothing about Pakistani military incursions until late April when India found out what was happening. Consequently, if Naik is to be believed, Sharif should be exonerated any responsibility for Kargil which must be pinned instead on a military that was

⁵ Curiously, Musharraf makes no mention of the eight hours that Sharif reportedly spent at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on 2 February, eighteen days before he met Vajpayee at Lahore.

⁶ It is important to bear in mind that Musharraf's interpretation of Kargil as a defensive operation that did not involve Pakistani forces crossing the LoC is shared by few observers.

running amok outside of any effective political control (Baruah 1999; Malhotra 1999b – see also Wirsing 2003: 34; Kapur 2007: 119).

The degree of Sharif's complicity for Kargil probably lies between the two extremes discussed above. It is straining credibility to think that he knew nothing about the operation, and it seems most likely that he and the Defence Committee approved the military moves (Kapur 2007: 119). However, it is conceivable that he did not know the specific operational details, crucially the degree of infiltration across the LoC that the Kargil plan entailed. This is what Sharif has subsequently claimed about his role in the Kargil operation. He said in an interview with S. Paul Kapur in 2006 that 'I was misled by Musharraf on Kargil. He did not tell me a lot of things. He kept me in the dark by not really giving me the true picture...I had the feeling that General Musharraf had stabbed *me* in the back' (Kapur 2007: 120-21). But even with the degree of knowledge that Sharif did have, it is astonishing that he did not worry about the impact that such an operation could have on the fledgling peace process. Perhaps as Perkovich suggested, 'Sharif may have thought that Lahore-style diplomacy and military aggression were not incompatible (2002: 473). If so, this shows an astonishing lack of judgment on Sharif's part, and a complete failure in both intention and capacity to exercise security dilemma sensibility. There is also the further twist that even if Sharif was worried that Kargil might have the effect of strangling at birth the trust that he had begun to build up with Vajpayee, was he too weak politically to resist the generals (Sidhu 2000: 191-2; Dittmer 2001: 973).

Vajpayee had taken a risky leap of trust in going to Lahore, but Sharif assuming the optimistic view of his intentions had also taken a leap fraught with

risks in signing the Lahore Declaration. If the Pakistani prime minister was to sustain that leap, he needed the Indian leadership to make an even bigger leap that matched the symbolism of Lahore with concrete movement on Kashmir. It could be argued that this was exactly what Vajpayee was trying to do through the backchannel talks which Naik claimed were bearing fruit. However, if this process lacked political visibility, and such processes often depend for their success on remaining invisible until they are ready to be revealed to the world, then it would have been hard for Sharif to build up political support in the government for the path of negotiation in the face of a military that was eager to exploit its new found nuclear status to pursue conventional gains in Kashmir. If the Indian leadership had been better attuned to these domestic constraints on Sharif's room for manoeuvre, they might have appreciated the importance of making yet another frame-breaking conciliatory move to bolster the trust between the two political leaderships. As one official from India's External Affairs Ministry reflected during the Kargil crisis, 'We didn't build quickly enough [on the achievements of Lahore]...Sharif took a risk for better relations, but we didn't reciprocate with concessions over Kashmir. He had nothing to show for it to a sceptical army' (Kremmer 1999).

Recreating the atmosphere of trust after Kargil

There was certainly no appetite for new concessions in the months following Kargil. Despite the earlier popularity of his bus diplomacy, Vajpayee now came under attack at home for letting himself be tricked by Sharif at Lahore (Kremmer 1999; Wirsing 2003: 59). The Indian Prime Minister, leading a caretaker government pending new elections in September, reverted to the default position of governments when it comes to building trust with rivals and adversaries. This

is that the other side is presumed to have shown by their behaviour that they have hostile intent, and countering this threat requires that decision-makers adopt the prescriptions of Jervis's deterrence model. Governments operating with this frame often remain open to the possibility that trust can be built. However, they see this as critically dependent upon their adversary taking the steps that demonstrate their trustworthiness.

Having been open to the possibility that India and Pakistan were trapped in a spiral and not a deterrent situation, Vajpayee went back after the betrayal at Kargil to assigning enemy status to Pakistan (Khan 2005: 173). Speaking on 23 July in the immediate aftermath of the Kargil crisis, he said that 'Pakistan will have to re-create the atmosphere of trust it had destroyed by intruding into Kargil. Only then can the dialogue process be revived' (Vajpayee 1999). To rebuild trust, the Indian leader stipulated that Pakistan must meet the following highly exacting conditions. First, it had to accept the inviolability of the LoC, and second Islamabad had to take effective steps to end the cross-border terrorism on the territory of Jammu and Kashmir (Wirsing 2003: 59). Vajpayee knew that Pakistan could never accept these demands as a precondition for dialogue, and expectations for peace became even lower when Musharraf deposed Sharif in a military coup in October 1999.

Low-intensity conflict rumbled on in Kashmir during 2000 as the military led government supported the Kashmiri militants, leading to increased infiltration across the LoC. However, there was no repeat of the shooting war of the previous year. Recognising that there was no military solution to the problem of Kashmir, Vajpayee, whose BJP party had been returned to power in the last election, made

yet another peace overture. But there was no leap this time. In a modest but important step, India declared in November 2000 a unilateral cease-fire and Pakistan reciprocated with the offer of a truce along the LoC (Wirsing 2003: 60-1; Khan 2005: 174). After six months, India suddenly terminated the ceasefire, but Vajpayee in yet another startling development invited Musharraf to meet with him at Agra in July (Wirsing 2003: 61).

Despite meeting face-to-face for several hours over two days, there was little evidence that these particular leaders were able to enter a 'space of trust.'⁷ Relations were cordial, but both sides remained fundamentally divided on the issue of Kashmir. By contrast with Lahore, there was no final declaration, no joint press conference, and not even a formal handshake before the world's media (Wirsing 2003: 62-3).⁸

A few months later militant groups in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) struck against the Indian Parliament building, triggering a massive mobilisation of Indian forces along the LoC and on the international border with Pakistan. India blamed Pakistan for the attacks believing that the Musharraf government controlled the Kashmiri groups using terrorist tactics. New Delhi's explicit threats to destroy the training camps and cross into PoK if Pakistan did not take decisive action to stop the attacks suggested that India was not deterred from

⁷ I am grateful to Meenakshi Gopinath for suggesting this terminology.

⁸ See Musharraf 2006: 299 for an account of the meeting which blames Vajpayee for his timidity in the face of hardliners within his own government.

taking such action by Pakistan's nuclear arsenal; indeed, it is argued that Kargil had convinced Indian planners that it was possible to fight a limited conventional war (one which did not threaten Pakistan's very survival) without it escalating to the nuclear level (Kapur 2007). A combination of Indian threats and US pressure led Musharraf to promise that Pakistan territory would not be used as a launching ground for terrorism (Kapur 2007).

However, the hollowness of this promise or the limited control that Islamabad exercised over these groups was revealed on 14 May 2002 when militants struck against an Indian army camp at Kaluchak. This time India threatened a major assault against Pakistan itself, aimed at destroying the Pakistan army (Kapur 2007: 134-5). India's then National Security Advisor, Brajesh Mishra, has subsequently claimed that Pakistan's promise, elicited under strong US pressure, to end its support for cross-border terrorism was a vindication of India's strategy of coercive diplomacy (See Mishra interviewed in Kapur 2007). Other commentators have rejected this claim pointing out that not only has the Pakistan Government failed to live up to the commitment it made in 2002, but also even more tellingly, that India decided not to launch a major conventional attack against Pakistan because of the fear that this might escalate to the nuclear level (Ganguly and Hagerty 2005: 167-82 – compare Kapur 2007).

The experience of having gone eyeball to eyeball (Dean Rusk's memorable phrase from the Cuban Missile Crisis) during the 2002 crisis brought home to Indian and Pakistani leaders just how much they shared a common interest in avoiding war in a nuclearised South Asia. The superpowers near fatal collision

over Cuba had spurred their efforts to agree nuclear risk reduction measures, and the same dynamics can be seen at work in the South Asian context.

In 2004 India and Pakistan began a 'Composite Dialogue' that has continued up until the present day and which encompasses both nuclear CSBMs and Kashmir. These negotiations have been periodically interrupted, most recently after the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan's continuing support of militant groups. Yet despite the regular discussions that have taken place on nuclear CSBMs since 2004, there has been little substantive progress beyond the measures agreed at Lahore. This is a reflection not only of the continuing distrust in the relationship, but also of the fundamental problem that Pakistan has held agreement on nuclear CSBMs hostage to serious movement on the Kashmir issue.

Conclusion

I want to make three points by way of conclusion. First, a leap of trust can only work in those situations where governments have peaceful/defensive intentions but each fails to understand how its own actions might be seen as threatening by the other. In a Jervisian spiral of this kind, the challenge for decision-makers is to *both* exercise and operationalise policies of security dilemma sensibility. The most remarkable practical expression of this is a leap of trust such as the one Vajpayee took in going to Lahore. A leap is aimed at sending a powerful signal of a state's potential trustworthiness and it can only succeed if the target of the leap also views the relationship in spiral terms. If one of the players continues to believe that it can make gains at the expenses of its adversary then there can be no basis for a trusting relationship. In the South Asian context, this requires

that both India and Pakistan give up the belief that the military option might work in Kashmir; it was the refusal of key Pakistani military leaders to do this that led to the crisis at Kargil.

The second factor that bears crucially on the potential for building trust between India and Pakistan is the paradoxical impact that nuclear capabilities have had on their relationship. Vajpayee's growing sense in the run-up to the meeting at Lahore that he was destined to play a key role in bringing peace to South Asia is an important explanation of the leap he took. However, he also appears to have believed that India's new nuclear status placed upon it a responsibility to work with Pakistan in developing a new regime of strategic restraint. At the same time, there is some evidence that the Indian leader saw nuclear weapons as providing a margin of safety in beginning a new dialogue with Islamabad. This can be seen in his comment that 'Despite what you Americans say, the 'bomb gives us the confidence to make peace' (quoted in Perkovich 2002: 471).

Yet if Vajpayee and his inner circle felt the arrival of the Indian bomb facilitated the building of trust with its arch-enemy, the opposite was the case in the thinking of key Pakistani military leaders who appear to have viewed the bomb as making possible limited conventional probes in Kashmir without the fear that this would escalate to higher levels of violence (Perkovich 2002: 473; Kapur 2007). The conclusion to be drawn from these differing perceptions of the role of the bomb in the South Asian context is that they both enabled Vajpayee and Sharif's dialogue at Lahore and also contributed to its derailment at Kargil.

Third, and most importantly from a trust-building perspective, an optimistic reading of Sharif's motives and intentions leads to the conclusion that building and sustaining trust depends upon both a united government and strong leadership. Offensive realism has highlighted the obstacles to building trust that arise from the problem of future uncertainty. But in this case the problem was not that Sharif's successors failed to live up to the commitments that he as Pakistan's prime minister had entered into at Lahore. Instead, the trust-building process collapsed because the civilian leadership was insufficiently in control of Pakistan's national security policy (Wirsing 2003: 35; Perkovich 2002: 472) and Sharif failed to appreciate that a Kargil type adventure was incompatible with the diplomatic process that he had begun at Lahore (Perkovich 2002: 473).

It is a fascinating counter-factual whether another Pakistani leader who had the insight to fully understand the impact on the peace process of a military operation like the one that was being planned at Kargil would have overruled the military on this. What is more, there was an opportunity for New Delhi to influence such calculations that was perhaps missed. Had Vajpayee followed up the Lahore meeting with a major concession on Kashmir, would this have tipped the balance internally in favour of Sharif and his supporters who were committed to the process of dialogue? Perhaps this would have been the outcome of the back-channel diplomacy on Kashmir that the record suggests was taking place after Lahore. As it was, the promise of the back-channel process was crushed by the Pakistan military's timetable for Kargil. How to shield trust-building initiatives from domestic opponents - especially leaps which leave their

progenitors most exposed politically - is a major challenge that will face future trust-building endeavours in the South Asian context and elsewhere.

Ten years after the promise of trust that was briefly glimpsed at Lahore, New Delhi and Islamabad remain distrustful and suspicion of each other. Breaking this cycle of fear and suspicion probably requires a similar dramatic move to the one that Vajpayee made in going to Lahore. It remains to be seen whether current and future leaders in India and Pakistan have the imagination and vision to rise to this challenge, and whether any future leaps will be more successful in developing trust between India and Pakistan than the ones taken by Vajpayee and Sharif ten years ago.

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